

Showcase

By Tom Kidd



Bachelor's Anonymy: A gay group that's finding more acceptance with hetero clubgoers.

"Robert and David are disgusted. The new and used bins are choked with recorded trivia. Democracy governs the airwaves: The people get what they want. Over and over, again and again, the people want what they get. They drink in nightclubs to forget why they left the house in the first place, hitting the bar after the band's second number."

This disgusting and all too true scenario is the first entry in the press kit of Bachelors Anonymous. That kind of setup, though, is something one never sees at a Bachelors gig. Their music is too demanding, their stage presentation too riveting for anybody to be lured by the more mundane concerns of an empty beer bottle. They are political, sociological, and distinctly gay. Not that anyone should be put off by that last fact, however. Bachelors Anonymous are neither limited nor liberated by their gayness. Like everything else they sing about, their sexual inclination is viewed as just another part of life.

Life, of course, is a very important consideration today, whether one is gay or not. Bachelor boys David Hughes and Robert Berg are concerned not just about the length of it, but also its quality.

The duo has appeared at the

L.A. Weekly's Rock Against AIDS concert, West Hollywood's Christopher Street West fair, and venues all over town. At the time of our interview, their self-titled debut cassette was exclusively available through Silver Lake's A Different Light bookstore, and they had been the subject of a two-page spread in the *Advocate*. The mainstream has been a little slower to catch up on the Bachelors' work, but chalk that up to their unorthodox (for L.A.) performance-art style. The Anti-Club, Lingerie, and Be-Bop Records have all played host to their stimulating style.

"People ask us if we think our music is only going to appeal to gay people," Hughes says. "Our answer is: 'Haven't I been listening to heterosexual love songs all my life? Don't I buy them, and won't I continue to?'"

"People relate to the concept of the song," Berg adds. "If it happens to be a love song, or has something to do with a same-sex relationship, then it's just there. It's not to hammer any point down."

The Bachelors are a fairly new addition to the Los Angeles scene. The duo's first club gig was at the AntiClub in January 1985. Berg and Hughes had met not long before that in choir practice. While that may seem like an odd meeting

place considering the Pope's view of their lifestyle, Berg explains, "Neither of us is Catholic, but we both like to sing, and the choir there sings really good Renaissance."

Performing for the first time together at a choir appreciation dinner soon after meeting, Berg and Hughes formed a duo, both personally and professionally. Neither, it should be noted, was without experience. Berg's early band, the Razor's Edge, had released an album called *The Only Way Out Is In*. (He was a monk at the time.) Hughes had served a three-year membership with Age of Consent, a gay duo that received sporadic local airplay. "What we were doing with Age of Consent," Hughes remembers, "was something far more obvious. It [being a gay band] was a badge that we used. Maybe 20 percent of what we're doing now is sexually oriented."

The music of Bachelors Anonymous shows elements borrowed from such liberated groups as Bronski Beat, Communards, and Erasure. These points are mixed with classical (as opposed to classic) elements culled from a shared love of folk and church music. "When people ask us what we sound like," Hughes explains, "I have to give them a big name that they recognize, like Tears for Fears or Depeche Mode or something like that, mainly because those bands are using synthetic or sampled sounds. Personally, though, I don't listen to a lot of synthesized music."

Synthesizers do play a major part in the band's sound, however. One reason for this is that keyboards are Hughes' principal instrument. Another good reason is that they are easier to record than guitars, which is an important advantage when an act has no back-up band. "We don't have a rehearsal space, we don't have money to pay people to play, because we're not making any money," Berg explains. "To keep a band together takes too much time. To keep a job, a band, clubs, recording, it's too much."

"Sometimes I wonder if people don't take us seriously because we lack a band," Hughes ponders. "They might think that we're just a

cabaret act or something. Brendan [Mullen of Club Lingerie] was willing to take a chance on us because the scene is so dead right now. He took a chance on us because he's bored."

What Mullen took a chance on was a weekend night that was turned, under the auspices of Bachelors Anonymous, into a performance-art extravaganza. The duo booked the other acts (most, though not all, were gay), and set the tone for the evening with a show that relied, as usual, as much on performance as music. Their staging is used to get an effect from the audience, one way or another.

"For the most part, our stuff can be taken very seriously," says Hughes. "I was talking to a woman who went to our Lingerie show; she said that during our song about AIDS she got scared at the end and almost started crying. For me, the same thing happened. We had given a really good performance at UCLA, and this time I felt that I really knew what I was going to do during the song. Sometimes if you duplicate something it won't work, because this is a very dramatic type of thing. At the end, it really started to frighten me. Something took hold of me and it got really creepy."

In this area of raised consciousness, forced though it may be, a sociologically inclined gay act such as this might have an easier time crossing over. Berg agrees. "I think the straight people react in a more positive manner than the gay people. "In a way, it is a great gimmick," Hughes admits. "It's new enough to hear men singing songs to other men. You hear that and it's still kind of shocking. It's still titillating and makes you prick up your ears. In that sense, it is a gimmick to help get some interest. If that was the whole point though, to what we had to do, to what we're offering, it would be terrible."

If Bachelors Anonymous does not have the whole concept of "making it" figured out, then it is certainly not from lack of brain-and-footwork. After all, as Berg concludes: "I think we have every right to sell as many records as the Communards do, or as any group. We just have to get the opportunity." ■



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Dialogue: Gay Matter

Readers often assume that those who write for a given publication share the same values and viewpoints. This may be the case with some magazines, but we can assure you that there is no consensus of opinion at MC. Witness the following heated exchange between two of our regular contributors.—Ed.

I really hate lashing out against a fellow MC contributor, but I've held my temper long enough with the otherwise extremely talented pen of my gay-sympathizing and admittedly homosexual friend Tom Kidd. His recent showcase on the gay activist group Bachelors Anonymous (April 18) is yet another installment in the Tom Kidd Crusade for the Poor and Battered Homosexual Singer/Songwriter. I can't recall how many of these vomit-inducing pieces Kidd does a year; all local reviews of no-name gay groups who sing love songs to their male lovers (some of whom—as in B.A.—are situated within the group itself) and yet can't seem to find their niche in the recording industry.

Boy, this business is just at its absolute worst when an innocent little homo duo like B.A. can't get the recognition they so greatly deserve. Their material seems commercial enough—songs about AIDS, and uh, songs about their male lovers, and, uh, songs about AIDS. Now call me stubborn, call me old-fashioned, even call me Reaganistic if you must, but reading about an admittedly gay couple performing at a benefit to fight AIDS is about as ludicrous as Pat Travers donating the profits from "Snortin' Whiskey and Drinkin' Cocaine" to the Betty Ford Clinic.

Kidd has always spoken out for the gay musical community, ever since his letter to MC editor Bud Scoppa a few years back scolding the club circuit for not booking enough gay bands. I've been booking locally for almost eight years and can guarantee that most of this circuit's penny-pinching clubowners don't care *what* on earth you're singing about—just as long as you can play a decent beat and bring a few people in with you.

It's real easy for unsuccessful musicians like Kidd and his flock to put blame on others for their own unfulfilled ambitions. Unfortunately, gay bands like B.A.—and others like them that Kidd sheds tears for—seem more concerned right now in finding a cure for AIDS and trying to justify their own abominable lifestyle than doing what is necessary to make their music heard by the masses. Stop whining, guys—I always thought that was just a stereotype. —Steve Kozak

I've been writing now for three years, averaging one piece per issue.

During this time, a grand total of five pieces have been gay-themed, two of them commentaries. I'm sure a vast number of my review subjects, including Kozak's clients Mojo Nixon, Seaweed Sandcrabs, and Mahatma Lew and the Hosanna, all of which received glowing reviews from me, will be surprised to hear their own manager refer to *them* as "no-name gay groups." Los Angeles is still a very closeted town, performance-wise. Of those who own up to their sexual heritage, only a few are ready for the kind of interest an industry mag like this one can generate. Bachelors Anonymous are performance artists, which is something I have long been interested in, and they write good songs. By the way, B.A. are the *only* openly gay group I have ever reviewed or presented in a Showcase.

If you're going to write, Steve, learn how to research. B.A. *do* sing songs about their male lovers, but then, singing about female lovers would be a sham. I realize lots of closeted gay artists do that gender switch, but I still feel honesty is the best policy. They are setting themselves up for a much larger fall later on in their careers. Songs about AIDS? B.A. has one, but that's it. Who doesn't nowadays?

"Now call me stubborn, call me old-fashioned, even call me Reaganistic..." Kozak says. How about bigoted and ill-informed? Blaming gays for AIDS is akin to blaming Jews for the Holocaust. In case you don't read, Steve, let me be the first to point out AIDS is now *everybody's* problem. While we were the first AIDS victims, we were also the first group to demand the search for a cure. One wonders how much benefit work Kozak's clients have done. Methinks very little.

Priorities? How silly of us in the gay community to even try to find a cure for the most devastating disease of the century, when we could be out there with Kozak and his clients playing clubs and shopping tapes.

In the final analysis, let me say that I have always been a supporter of good local music, regardless of its sexual orientation. I will continue to try to bring worthy bands, whether gay or straight, to the attention of the recording industry. Attacks like Kozak's only serve to strengthen my resolve.

—Tom Kidd

News

LIVE MUSIC

Atlantic Spins 40th Bash

By Drew Wheeler

NEW YORK—Atlantic Records' all-star Fortieth Anniversary concert, held on May 14 at Madison Square Garden, was subtitled "It's Only Rock 'N' Roll." How strange that a Rolling Stones song should title the show, when the Stones, as well as fellow Atlantic legends Cream, the Who, and Aretha Franklin were conspicuous by their absence. [And where was Atlantic cornerstone Ray Charles?!—Ed.] Despite the prodigious talents involved, an event that promises so much usually wears its flaws on its lapel. Why did the Manhattan Transfer do five songs and Wilson Pickett only two? Is there anybody left alive who cares to see Keith Emerson and Carl Palmer's syntho-noodling? Why point out the problems of one-hit artists like Nu Shooz, Stacey Q, and Laura Branigan by dragging each out to perform their one hit? If Debbie Gibson's set hadn't been scheduled right before Robert Plant's, wouldn't there have been a lot less booing? Why did I expect a massive Michelob banner to unfurl when Phil Collins sang "In The Air Tonight?" How could I have missed Iron Butterfly doing "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida"? Will Crosby, Stills and Nash ever give us a break and *stop* reuniting?

The Led Zeppelin reunion (with Bonham *fil*s on drums) exceeded even the Robert Plant solo set as the day's highlight, if the primal howls of the much-in-force Zep fans were to be believed. The announcers tauntingly reminded the audience of the impending Zep set like pet owners who tease their dogs before letting them ride in the car. The long-awaited six Zeppelin songs (including "Heartbreaker," "Whole Lotta Love," and "Stairway to Heaven") proved to be both a thrill and a disappointment, starting endless (and pointless) discussions of "what happened to Page?"

Unfairly neglected amidst the Zepmania was the Rascals reunion, a joy despite vocalist/percussionist Eddie Brigati's absence. Felix Cavaliere tore his way through the timeless hits "People Got to Be Free," "Good Lovin'," and a long version of "Groovin'" that included snippets of "Apples Peaches Pumpkin Pie," "Just My Imagination," and "Everyday People." ■



Brother Ray was M.I.A.

Some of the soul events were touched by the Big Chill, a process through which the breathing, bleeding music that Atlantic helped nurture is transformed into another yuppie "collectible." Humorless host Dan Ackroyd was featured in a depressing vocal duet of "Soul Man" with a Dave-less Sam Moore. I can't help thinking that Ackroyd's preppies-on-a-lark attitude made for some furrowed brows up in rock & roll heaven that night. Similarly, TV character Paul Shaffer had no place singing with Carla Thomas in the Otis Redding tribute—but not even that travesty could undermine Miki Howard's heart-stopping rendition of "Try a Little Tenderness."

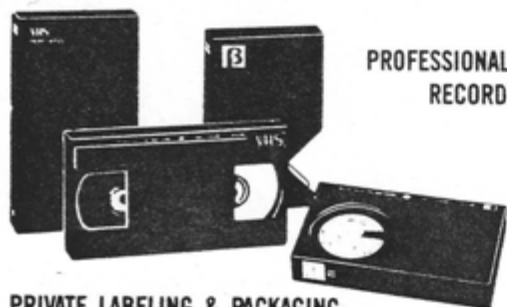
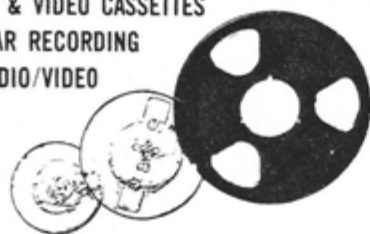
Host Robert Townsend was funny and quick-witted, intoning chasteningly, "I smell marijuana!" He ad-libbed furiously (and hounded the event's hottest celeb, Michael Douglas) on HBO. The cable channel broadcast the final four hours of the program live, accompanied by "taped highlights" of daytime performances. Westwood One had worldwide radio rights and promised half the air-time revenues to the Atlantic Records Foundation, a multiple-charity umbrella organization.

Viewing the concert on a "serious pop-journalistic" level, the best food by far was found at the hospitality suite sponsored by Coca-Cola, the self-proclaimed "Official Soft Drink of Summer" (a title it reluctantly assumed after failing to acquire the rights to the other three seasons). Of course, while the Real Thing flowed like water in the press areas, the well had long since run dry for the fans outside. In a Garden hallway, one matronly concessionaire pointed at the Diet Coke in my hand and winked, "They'll kill you for that." ■

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Feedback

Legible Bachelors

Dear MC:

We were both amused and dismayed by Steve Kozak's comments in *Dialogue* (May 30). His main point appeared to be that we were "whining" about not getting bookings because we are a gay band. We have never been turned down by a club because we are gay (or for any other reason) and therefore have never complained about it. However, we do feel that most record companies have avoided gay material like the plague and that is why we started our own label, Significant Other.

Mr. Kozak also referred to our "abominable lifestyle." If this reference can be taken seriously at all, which is difficult, it reveals more about his own neurotic guilt than much else. We hereby extend to him and any others with overactive imaginations an open invitation to observe our Bachelor life. What you'll find is quite ordinary: two guys holding down 40-hour-per-week jobs who come home to work on their music almost every night and weekend. Really wild, dude!

That this sort of "dialogue" need even take place only indicates how far we all have to travel to become comfortable with our sexualities. We take this opportunity to thank Tom Kidd for exposing readers to the diversity around them, and *Music Connection* for providing him the medium to do so.

Robert & David
Bachelors Anonymous

P.S. Contrary to popular belief, we are not, nor have we ever been, a "couple." We remain eligible bachelors.

Homophobia?

Dear MC:

The following is in response to Steve Kozak's remarks made about MC contributor Tom Kidd (May 30).

"Too bad for the gay revolution 'cause this is as far as you get/Well if you think you're free just listen to me you ain't seen nothing yet/We're all going to feel the backlash of pure (phobic) power/Kicking us down when we're on the ground is gonna be their finest hour/Better decide which side you're on if left is right than right is wrong... you better decide which side you're on."—Tom Robinson, 1978.

Tom Kidd has been a friend of mine for nearly a decade. Not once has his homosexuality been an

issue. In fact, I admire Kidd for sacrificing his privacy to work for social justice. Kozak's remarks were quite ugly. First he compares a gay group playing at an AIDS benefit to Pat Travers' song about getting high and donating royalties from it to the Betty Ford Clinic. I have never heard anyone say, "Hey, let's go get AIDS tonight," whereas I've heard many people want to go out and get "wasted." I don't find anything odd about a gay band wanting to help raise money to fight a disease that has affected this population so drastically. Should we get rid of poster children who are used to fight illness which they are afflicted with?

Among Kozak's moronic remarks, he attacks Kidd's success. By what standard do you measure someone else's success? Do you have some guidelines from God? Success can only be measured in terms of personal achievement, not whether your album has hit *Billboard's* top 100.

Homophobia is also a disease; apparently Kozak has it. However, unlike the as-yet incurable AIDS, Kozak can be cured. The medicine is simple—it's called education.

Rick Terkel
San Diego, CA

Absolute Imperfection

Dear MC:

I would like to make a couple of clarifications regarding Tom Cheyney's article on Pato Banton (May 30). The song "Absolute Perfection" was written, arranged, and produced by Jack Butler and Paul Shaffer (no, not him) of Private Domain, and performed by Private Domain. It was recorded in 1983, and in the 1987 version, Pato was hired as a session player and did his rap, which Jack and Paul later dropped in. The track was then licensed to Pato for his U.S. and U.K. albums, to help him expand his audience. It also, of course, appears on Private Domain's album on NuBeat/Priority Records. Additionally, Private Domain has never been Pato's backing group, though he has sat in with them several times at Private Domain gigs.

Mike Jacobs
Manager, Private Domain
Garden Grove, CA

Where Credit Is Due: In the May 16 issue of *MC*, the photo of Sending Unit attributed to Mary Light (Club Reviews, page 35) should have been credited to Vicki Olson. And on page 20 of our June 13 issue, the outspoken Billy Sheehan was photographed by the ubiquitous Neil Zlozower.